

FROM 11/22/05
"CHARLESTON DAILY MAIL"
NEWSPAPER

New program helps with heating costs

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

West Virginia residents who can't pay their heating bills this winter have a new place to seek help.

Warming Hearts and Hands is a statewide effort of the United Way of the Eastern Panhandle and the Health and Human Services Collaborative.

The collaborative, organized by state Sen. John Unger, D-Berkeley, uses funds from government programs, community donations and nonprofit agencies like the United Way. The main source of government funding for heating costs is the Low Income Energy Assistance Program through the state Department of Health and Human Resources.

If those funds are not available or not enough to cover a particular cost, Warming Hearts

and Hands can step in. Both programs help people based on income and household size.

Emergency payments also are available. Payments are made directly to the heating provider.

"There are going to be people affected, because of the drastic increase of heat, who have never had assistance before," Unger said Monday.

The collaborative is helping people pay for heat this winter, then in the spring it will help weatherize homes so clients don't have to spend so much next winter.

More information about both programs is available through the Department of Health and Human Resources or by calling the state information number, 211. Anyone who wants to donate to the effort can do so at United Way offices.

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